

Tornado Safety Planning for Schools

Planning to keep your school tornado-safe can seem daunting, but it might actually be easier than you think.

Good preparation is one of the best defenses against all severe weather, and tornadoes especially.

We've gathered some of our best tips on how to be ready in the charts on this page. You might not be able to do them all in your school system tomorrow, but each one you can add to your plan is one more level of safety.

Every bit helps!



Severe weather can strike with only a few minutes of warning



Basements are safest, along with interior spaces on the lowest floor



During all kinds of severe weather, students are safer at school than on buses. Delay dismissal if needed!

Tornado Safety Planning Checklist

- **Develop a tornado safety plan**
Every school's needs, resources, and location are unique - come up with a plan that best suits yours.
- **Set up a schedule of tornado drills**
Plans mean very little without practice! Establish a routine for regular tornado drills to help everyone get and stay familiar with the plan.
- **Designate tornado shelter areas**
Have your school inspected to determine the best places to take shelter, and make sure they're clearly marked. (Consider some mascot-incorporated signage!)
- **Decide who's responsible for your plan**
The personnel responsible for deciding if your plan needs to be activated should be aware of their role, and monitor the news for weather updates. (Consider getting them a NOAA Weather Radio as a backup.)
- **Plan for a power outage**
Many school alarm systems rely on electricity, which tornadoes can shut down. Prepare a backup plan! (Consider: air horns, megaphones, backup generators)
- **Make sure your plan includes everyone**
Students with disabilities, access or functional needs, or even just those using outdoor/portable classrooms will have additional needs if a tornado strikes. Be prepared!
- **Know your local experts**
Your local emergency management office will have more detailed info on both the weather hazards facing you and the resources available to help. Contact them to learn more!

After a Storm

Questions to Ask

- **Will the storm affect dismissal?** (Is debris affecting bus routes?)
- **Do we need a reunification plan?** (How will we notify parents?)
- **Are extracurriculars affected?** (Have we notified participants?)
- **Are we reassuring our students?** (Guidance counselors can help!)
- **How will we address the event with parents?** (A note home is a good start!)
- **Did our response go well?** (Assess which parts of your plan worked, which didn't, and how to improve)

It's important to know the difference between a **tornado watch** and a **tornado warning**.

WHAT TO DO

Keeping yourself and your students safe is as easy as **1 - 2 - 3**

Watch: Conditions are right for a tornado to form in or around your area.

Warning: A tornado has actually been sighted near you, and more may come. Get to safety!

An easy way to remember is with the **PB&J Scale:**

(feel free to swap with your favorite food instead)

PB&J WATCH



- We have peanut butter, jelly, and bread available

PB&J WARNING

Sandwich icon by Tom Glass Jr (via Noun Project CCBY 3.0)



- There is an actual PB&J sandwich on our plate.

During a tornado watch...

1. **Postpone gatherings in large rooms.** Big, open spaces like gyms, cafeterias, and auditoriums don't offer much protection against tornado-strength winds.
2. **Keep track of the storm.** Use a map to follow the storm's progress through your area, and pay attention to weather bulletins for updates. Online maps are useful for this, but keep an old-fashioned highway map handy in case of power outage.
3. **Monitor, monitor, monitor.** Follow local radio, television, or online outlets like the Storm Prediction Center to learn about any ongoing or possible severe weather during the school day. Keep a NOAA weather radio in your classroom as a backup.

During a tornado warning...

1. **Announce the warning and reassure your students that they know what to do.** Warnings can understandably be scary, but they're there to give you time to be safe.
2. **Get everyone away from windows, glass doorways, and any items that could fall. Move to the innermost part of your building, on the lowest possible floor.** Even if you avoid an actual tornado, the severe winds and storm weather that accompany them can still break glass and shake walls.
3. **Once you're at a safe area, have everyone crouch low to the floor, face down, and cover their heads with their hands.** Any little bit of extra safety helps, and this pose can help protect your students if anything does fall.

We want to make sure everyone stays safe and accounted for! Keep an eye out for anyone with special needs, and lend them a hand. Take attendance early and often, especially after you move to or from the safe area.

Your help and guidance will go a long way towards making sure everyone comes out okay. Thank you!